

NEWS RELEASE

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DeNUCCI SAYS MWRA TAKING STEPS TO PROTECT WATER SUPPLY FROM ATTACKS

State Auditor Joe DeNucci, in the first of a series of homeland security-related reports evaluating how state agencies and facilities are ensuring the effectiveness of their security, reported today that the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) has made substantial progress toward protecting the safety of its drinking water and wastewater treatment system.

According to DeNucci's audit, the MWRA has strengthened the security of the water supply through construction of the 17.6-mile Metro-West Tunnel, which lies hundreds of feet below ground and offers protection from attacks involving explosives or contaminants. Also, five relatively new covered water storage facilities have greatly reduced the vulnerability of reservoirs to contamination by being placed underground with controlled access.

DeNucci said the MWRA has also installed computer systems that control the operations of the water system facilities, and monitors alarms, provides operators with the ability to take remote control of a facility if necessary, and maintains contact with other state agencies.

Additionally, according to DeNucci's report, the MWRA has "hardened" security by adding card access to its most vulnerable buildings, installing intrusion devices at key locations that are monitored by control centers, adding additional fencing, locking facilities, placing Jersey barriers to prevent motor vehicle access, and using security guards. DeNucci's report noted that MWRA has accomplished many of these security improvements with its own funds, as only \$365,000 has been awarded to the authority by the State Homeland Security Program, despite a request for more funds.

DeNucci said the MWRA should implement additional security enhancements to protect its drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities, improve its communications with the state Department of Conservation and Recreation and the State Police, and update its emergency response plans.

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“The MWRA has accomplished a great deal to date in fulfilling its important mission to protect the Authority’s resources for the benefit of the many people who use these vital services,” said DeNucci.

The MWRA’s drinking water and wastewater treatment system serves approximately 2.2 million people in 47 communities through the Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River and Wachusett Reservoir watersheds.

The purpose of DeNucci’s homeland security initiative is to make sure that funds that are earmarked for security are spent properly and for the purposes intended, and that the agencies involved are fulfilling their responsibilities.